

February 22, 2011

To the Senate:

Pursuant to Article V, Section I, Paragraph 14 of the New Jersey Constitution, I am returning Senate Bill No. 2398 without my approval.

This bill attempts to facilitate collaboration between institutions of higher education and the business community by requiring the Commission on Higher Education to create and maintain a database containing the resources and non-privileged research and development efforts of our colleges and universities. The bill also attempts to improve the institutions' ability to receive federal funding by, for example, mandating that all higher education institutions develop staff training to improve grant writing and preparation. Finally, the bill imposes several responsibilities on the New Jersey Economic Development Authority (EDA) with the goal of improving the institutions' potential to receive federal funding.

While I commend the sponsors for their efforts to spur innovation in New Jersey by attempting to facilitate the exchange of information and collaboration between our business and higher education communities, I cannot support this bill at this time. As you know, my Task Force on Higher Education, established pursuant to Executive Order No. 26 (2010) and chaired by former Governor Tom Kean, recently issued a report outlining various recommendations concerning higher education governance in New Jersey. Specifically, the report calls for the elimination of the Commission on Higher Education and replacing it with a new structure with clearly defined duties.

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The report points out that over the years, the legislature and Governor have imposed many tasks on the Commission while, at the same time, the Commission has experienced a diminishing capacity to complete these additional responsibilities. This bill would place yet another, very significant responsibility on the Commission. I am inclined to agree with the Task Force's recommendation that a comprehensive restructuring of the governance of higher education in New Jersey is needed. To that end, we have begun to take steps to implement the recommendations of the Task Force and look forward to working with the legislature on more comprehensive reform. The issues addressed in this bill can and should be addressed as part of this overall reform. To attempt to treat this issue separately, without taking on the more fundamental problems with the governance of higher education, would be to continue the pattern of piecemeal legislation that has not worked and will only set up this initiative for failure.

While the ultimate goals of this bill are admirable, it would be inefficient to task our current Commission on Higher Education with the responsibilities outlined in the bill. I applaud the legislature's efforts to encourage and facilitate collaboration between the public sector and our colleges and universities, and I look forward to working closely with the legislature to achieve the ultimate goals of this legislation in a more effective and successful manner.

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Accordingly, I herewith return Senate Bill No. 2398 without  
my approval.

Respectfully,

/s/ Chris Christie  
Governor

[seal]

Attest:

/s/Jeffrey S. Chiesa  
Chief Counsel to the Governor